

How the pandemic has changed the race for Walden’s seat

Coronavirus has dramatically altered how the candidates are campaigning

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BEND — Republican Rep. Greg Walden’s retirement after 22 years in Congress attracted a crowd of conservative politicians to the state’s only reliably red district.

GOP hopefuls pack the primary ballot. Four of the 11 candidates have raised the most money in pursuit of their party’s nomination. Knute Buehler, Jimmy Crumpacker, Cliff Bentz and Jason Atkinson collectively report roughly \$2.5 million in campaign receipts.

The other Republican candidates who submitted information to be included in the voters’ pamphlet include Bend City Council member Justin Livingston, self-described “career commoner” and business operator Travis Fager, and computer programmer Jeff Smith. Anti-government activist Kenneth Medenbach, David Campbell, Glenn Carey and Mark Roberts also appear



A collection of political signs in Deschutes County between Bend and Redmond on Monday.

on the ballot.

The Democrats in the race have raised too little to require campaign finance reports.

Once upon a time, any serious candidate in Oregon’s 2nd Congressional District would be pounding pavement east of the Cascades right about now, driving up to eight hours between campaign events, and shaking a lot of hands along the way.

“Traditionally they’d be going to VFW halls, going to the Elks lodge, going

to county fairs and 4-H events,” said political strategist Chris Edmonds of Huble Communications, which isn’t working with any of the CD-2 candidates.

The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically altered how the candidates are campaigning this year — and no one is certain what the winning strategy will be.

Edmonds predicts the stay-at-home order will advantage those with the better-known names and the most money to spend

on advertising and targeted marketing.

“Because everybody’s stuck inside. So what are they doing? They’re watching TV. Or they’re on social media, surfing the internet, and spending a lot of time in those digital spaces,” he said.

Strategist Rebecca Tweed, who worked on Buehler’s 2018 campaign for Oregon governor, said she expects the forced break from road-tripping could even the playing field somewhat because candidates

utilizing digital technology like Zoom and Facebook Live “actually have an opportunity to reach more voters and more constituents than they would have if they were traveling city to city or event to event.”

Public comments were a silent stream of text bubbles and emojis at a recent virtual forum hosted by the Central Oregon City Club and League of Women Voters last week.

The moderator navigated a few tech snafus before the opening question dropped: “How long have you been a resident in District 2?”

The candidates answered in decades, except for one.

“One year,” Crumpacker said.

The former Portlander registered to vote in Deschutes County for the first time last year on Nov. 20 — three weeks after Walden announced he would retire.

A self-described commodities trader, he hasn’t held elected office before or even voted in more than half of Oregon’s elections since 2012.

So far, he’s raised more than \$834,000 in receipts as of the latest FEC filings, including a \$200,000 loan to himself.

Crumpacker is being backed by the state’s largest anti-abortion group. Ore-

gon Right To Life pledged to defeat the other top fundraiser in the race, Buehler.

“That’s not unusual. I’ve had that almost every time I run for political office and it really centers around my pro-choice views,” Buehler said in a recent interview with OPB.

The former state representative from Bend reports over \$1 million in campaign receipts. He’s run for many state offices, and in this federal election, he’s still branding himself in the voter pamphlet as tough on Gov. Kate Brown and “PDX liberals.”

But, he’s taken heat within his own party for criticizing the Trump administration.

“I’ve always described myself as an independent-minded Republican. And when President Trump is right, I agree with him and when he’s wrong, I disagree with him,” he said.

Meanwhile, Ontario attorney Cliff Bentz wants GOP primary voters to consider the former state senator’s 12-year history with the minority party in Salem.

Bentz tends to focus on Eastern Oregon agricultural issues, while his campaign messaging stresses his nearly lifelong residency in the district, minus a few years away at law school.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

